

**COLORADO RIVER RECOVERY PROGRAM
FY 99 ANNUAL PROJECT REPORT
FOR PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT PROJECTS**

Project No.: PIP-3

- I. Project title: Yampa River Basin Endangered Fish Recovery & Water Management Plan
- II. Public involvement coordinator: Gerry Roehm, Yampa River Coordinator
P.O. Box 25486, Denver Federal Center
Denver, Colorado 80225-0486
E-mail: gerry_roehm@fws.gov
Phone: (303) 236-8155 x272
Fax: (303) 236-8163

III. Project summary:

The objectives of the Yampa Plan are to provide water for existing and foreseeable future human needs in the Yampa River Basin and protect instream flows and aquatic habitat necessary to maintain and recover endangered fishes and protect other native fish and wildlife resources in the Yampa River Basin.

The principal objectives of this Public Involvement Plan are to:

1. Provide an avenue for effective local involvement in the development of the Yampa Plan;
2. Enhance the appreciation of the public and key stakeholders for the uniqueness of the Yampa River and the endangered fish;
3. Encourage landowners to cooperate in providing access to their lands to conduct fish studies;
4. Develop a plan in close coordination with angler groups that addresses how nonnative fish impacts will be addressed while providing recreational fish opportunities;
5. Enhance the image of the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the Recovery Program in the eyes of the public and key stakeholders as a credible entity to facilitate development of the Yampa Plan in a timely and responsible manner;
6. Increase support in the water, scientific and environmental community for the Yampa Plan.

Although the objectives of this plan have not changed, in mid-1999 the Recovery Program adopted a different approach to accomplish these objectives for the Yampa. The original strategy was to evaluate a variety of stream flow augmentation strategies within the context of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Ayres Associates was contracted to handle NEPA documentation and public involvement requirements. However, rather than follow the NEPA process, as previously envisioned, the Program decided to follow a programmatic approach similar to the one it was following for the 15-mile reach of the Colorado River. This decision also was prompted, in part, by the lack of a clear federal action on which to base the NEPA process. Moreover, some viewed the Yampa River Basin as receiving different treatment from other subbasins of the Upper Colorado River, and desired a measure of equity between the subbasins.

Under the programmatic approach, local stakeholders would work with representatives

of local, state, and federal agencies and environmental organizations to develop a management plan for the Yampa River. This management plan would serve as the basis for an intra-Service programmatic biological opinion (PBO) for the Basin. The federal action necessitating the PBO would be a Memorandum of Understanding between the FWS and local stakeholders to implement the management plan.

In June 1999, the Yampa River Coordinator completed FY 2000 scopes of work for the Yampa Public Involvement Plan and the Yampa Management Plan reflecting the change in approach. However, the FY 99 scopes do not reflect the change and, therefore, are not relevant to all of the work accomplished in FY 99. Moreover, certain tasks from the FY 99 scopes that are no longer relevant may have been omitted from this report.

The most significant accomplishment of FY 99 was completion of a draft report synthesizing the results and recommendations of various studies to determine and reconcile the water needs of humans and the endangered fishes. A synthesis conference was held in August 1999, bringing together research scientists with local stakeholders and representatives of local, state and federal agencies and environmental organizations to discuss the draft report and identify any significant issues requiring further discussion and resolution.

Later in August, the first meeting of the PBO workgroup was held in Steamboat Springs to draft an outline for the Management Plan and PBO.

At the annual meeting of the Yampa River Basin Partnership in September, the Yampa Coordinator gave a presentation summarizing the results of the synthesis conference and first PBO workgroup meeting and discussed the role of the Partnership in this process. He also distributed a revised MOU between the FWS and the Partnership to reflect the Partnership's role in facilitating development of a management plan for the Yampa.

IV. Study schedule: FY 1996-2000

V. Relationship to RIPRAP:

Green River Action Plan: Yampa and Little Snake Rivers
I.A.4.a.(3) Yampa River management plan

General Recovery Program Support Action Plan
VI.C. Plan and implement information and education and public involvement activities for all significant Recovery Program actions.

VI. Accomplishment of FY 99 objectives and tasks:

Objective: Provide an avenue for effective local involvement in the development of the Yampa Plan.

Task: Enter into an agreement with the Yampa River Basin Partnership whereby the Partnership would agree to: a) provide a public forum and host meetings where issues related to the Yampa Plan can be discussed; b) help disseminate information about the Recovery Program and the Yampa Plan to affected interest groups and

stakeholders in the Yampa Basin, including both members and nonmembers of the Partnership; and c) help educate local residents about the Yampa Plan.

The FWS entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Partnership in FY 97. In FY 99, the Partnership continued to perform its functions as specified by the MOU and outlined above to inform and involve the public in the Yampa planning process through regular monthly, special and annual meetings. However, at its July meeting, the Partnership requested that FWS revise the MOU to reflect the recent change from a NEPA-oriented process to a programmatic approach. The Yampa Coordinator subsequently drafted a new MOU between the FWS and the Partnership and distributed it to the Partnership at its annual meeting in September. The new MOU will be signed in FY 2000.

A “synthesis conference” of Yampa River research personnel, State and federal representatives, and local stakeholders was held in Craig, Colorado, in August 1999. A primary purpose of the meeting/workshop was to discuss a draft Yampa River research synthesis report. It also served to enhance the knowledge and awareness of the Potentially Affected Interests to the importance of the Yampa River in the recovery of the endangered fish and allowed those interests to express their concerns and identify significant issues that must be resolved before or during development of a management plan for the Yampa River.

Objective: Enhance the appreciation of the public and key stakeholders for the uniqueness of the Yampa River and the endangered fish.

Task: Write and disseminate news releases, op-ed pieces and letters to the editor on the purpose, activities, accomplishments and status of the Yampa Plan, including NEPA coordination, using freelance writers on contract where appropriate. Op-ed pieces and letters to the editor will be authored by key opinion makers in the valley.

The Yampa River Coordinator worked with the Recovery Program’s I&E specialist in developing new releases concerning the Yampa Plan. He also provided input to the Partnership for public notices, meeting agendas, issues statements, etc., and spoke with reporters from the *Craig Daily Press* to provide them with background information for an article concerning the Yampa Plan, which ran in August prior to the first meeting of the PBO workgroup.

Task: Investigate opportunities to educate school children about the Yampa River ecosystem and its importance to the endangered fish through the River Watch program, Project Wild, or other existing programs.

No work was accomplished under this task in FY 99.

Objective: Effectively involve the public in the NEPA process.

Although the public was invited to participate in several meetings in FY 99, these meetings were not public scoping meetings, pursuant to NEPA. Because we are following the programmatic approach of the 15-mile reach, the NEPA process has been deferred until after a management plan has been developed for the Yampa River. However, the public will be informed and encouraged to participate during

the development of the plan in FY 2000. Moreover, the MOU to implement the plan is a federal action, subject to both NEPA and ESA Section 7 requirements.

Objective: Enhance the image of the FWS and the Recovery Program in the eyes of the public and key stakeholders as a credible entity to develop the Yampa Plan in a timely and responsible manner.

Task: The FWS Yampa Coordinator or representative should regularly attend County Commissioner, Craig City Council, and Yampa River Basin Partnership meetings to report on the Yampa Plan and identify concerns. Concerns should be addressed in a timely and straightforward manner.

Gerry Roehm and/or John Hamill attended most regular and special sessions of the Partnership in FY 99. Questions and concerns from members of the Partnership, as well as those of Potentially Affected Interests, were addressed candidly and timely. In January 1999, John Hamill left FWS for a position with the Department of the Interior. He will be missed.

Objective: Increase support in the water, scientific and environmental community for the Yampa Plan.

Task: Presentations at professional meetings and conferences emphasizing the dual objectives of the Yampa Plan (i.e., water for people and water for fish). Articles about the Yampa Plan in environmental and water group newsletters.

Gerry Roehm gave a presentation on the Yampa Plan, ESA, and the PBO process to a meeting of the Colorado Water Conservation Board in July 1999. He also represented the Recovery Program at a conference hosted by NOAA/NWS to discuss the NWS' ability to predict snowpack and precipitation during the growing season. Long-range forecasting would be useful to the Program in estimating stream flows, water storage and release requirements to meet the needs of the endangered fishes. Mr. Roehm also briefed the Management Committee and Biology Committee on the status of the Yampa planning process and sought their guidance. In March he presented the results of Yampa River hydrologic modeling with the CRDSS to test the effects of future water development against instream flow recommendations of Modde et al. These results subsequently were published as an appendix to the synthesis report.

- VII. Recommendations: There is general consensus both within the Recovery Program and the local community that we develop a plan for the Yampa River to promote recovery of the listed fishes while the human population continues to develop its water resources in accordance with State law and interstate compacts. Although most stakeholders are in favor of the plan (and subsequent PBO), they could be considered reluctant participants in the process, due to the mandates of the ESA and not to any philosophical commitment to the recovery of endangered fishes. They believe this is something they must do for certainty that they can develop their water without regulatory interference from FWS. Some water users in the Yampa River Basin believe they are being held accountable for impacts to endangered fishes outside their control, such as those due to

Flaming Gorge dam and nonnative fishes. While the fishes may not be endangered due to the actions of water users in the Yampa Basin, their actions can play a pivotal role in their recovery. Therefore, it is especially important to educate all of the stakeholders regarding the value of the Yampa River to the recovery of endangered fishes:

The influence of the Yampa extends well beyond its hydrologic boundaries. It provides spawning habitat for razorback sucker and Colorado pikeminnow which disperse throughout the Green, White and Yampa rivers, and it contributes spring flows otherwise absent from the Green River which are critical to maintaining fish nursery habitats downstream from the confluence. Conversely, fish reared in Green River nurseries disperse back to the Yampa as adults.

It is questionable whether most stakeholders will ever embrace the value of these and other native species. Their reason for wishing to recover the species is purely pragmatic --to delist the fish so they will no longer be an impediment to development. This view is short-sighted in that recovery and delisting cannot be achieved without some certainty that the needs of the fishes will be met in the future. Even those who value these fishes believe they have been good stewards and resent that government is meddling in their affairs. Education is the key, beginning in the schools, but extending out into the adult population, as well.

- VIII. Project status: The project currently is on-track and ongoing. It is expected to continue through FY 2000 with the completion of a PBO and MOU. After FY 2000, we would enter the implementation phase of this project, and the Public Involvement Plan may be modified, as necessary, or discontinued. Until that time, however, it is more important than ever to engage all interested parties to participate in the development of an effective and implementable management plan.
- IX. FY 99 public involvement budget (Recovery Program funds only):
 - A. Funds provided: \$1,000
 - B. Funds expended: \$1,000
 - C. Difference: \$0
- X. Submitted by: Gerry Roehm
Date: December 8, 1999